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# FRENCH MILITARY MUSIC IN THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV

By MICHEL BRENET

THE magnificence of Versailles leaves no visitors unmoved. If they are but passing, it makes on their memory a deep impression of grandeur; but to those who know how to question it, it speaks a language in which every one feels vibrating the echo of his own inclinations. If his soul has, ever so little, a natural bent for revery, at the close of day, or in the midst of autumn the lonely loungeur will love to plunge into the shade of the groves or to stroll along the ponds reflecting in their standing mirror, with the last rays of the sun, the profiles of perished deities.

The artist, whatever his likings or his scholastic idiosyncrasy may be, will give way in meditative contemplation to the all powerful charm of these palaces, of these gardens, whose majestic harmony realizes the indissoluble union of strength and peace. But doubtless the historian will feel most deeply the attraction of these spots imbued with memories. At his call, life will rouse again. He will picture to himself, in mental visions, Versailles once more crowded with the people who built it, planted it, adorned it, under the command of the famous architects its creators, and under the impulse of the king their inspirer. Amid the chilling silence of the galleries and terraces, he will hear furtive steps stealing, whispering voices answering one another, and the remote harmony of vanquished concerts vibrating in the air.

Louis XIV, said Saint-Simon, "loved passionately all sorts of sumptuousness for his court." He took the same care in visiting the workings of Mansart or of Le Notre, or in favouring a musical improvement answering to his conception of noble luxury and regulated opulence.

The part he took in the development of art in France has greater value, from the fact that it was not mixed with any dilettante practice. Son of a king fond of music and of a queen infatuated, at least for some years, with Italian opera, Louis XIV reckoned among the teachers of his youth a guitar player, Bernard Jourdan de La Salle, whose lessons were not entirely fruitless. Thus, Charlotte de Bavière (the Palatine princess),

who became his sister-in-law in 1671, though asserting that he did not know "a note of music," acknowledges that he has a "good ear," that in the art of performing he is "more than a master on the guitar" and is able to play "all he wishes." His talent was a hidden one, kept, by a refined sense of the royal dignity, apart from praises as well as from raillery.

In 1672, as soon as the building of Versailles was sufficiently advanced to allow the king to spend there several months in the year, all varieties of musical art were called on to contribute to the pleasures of the court.

Besides the representation of lyric tragedies or ballets, the musicians of the Chamber and travelling performers, still rare at this time, sung and played cantatas and French or Italian instrumental pieces, during the king's supper or on the days of "Appartement"; the company of 24 violins and the other band of the musicians of "l'Ecurie" played at the hours of balls and during walks in the park or boating in gondolas on the ponds; in the chapel, a chorus, accompanied by thorough base and some instruments, performed concert motets; preceding the royal coach rode "the king's trumpets."

With the same period of the installation at Versailles are connected the documents which reveal to us the greatness and the efficacy of the interest Louis XIV took in military music.

We are not speaking of a new creation. For a long time the use of musical instruments in the armies had assumed the double meaning which former ages had foreseen and which the modern time was to keep up and make more precise: the adoption, on one hand, of a sonorous language translating in rhythms or in musical intervals the words of command, and, on the other hand, the coöperation of the symphony in the embellishment of military life, by richness of sounds added to richness of arms, and appeal to their power of stimulating energy, to the synonymy of the notes of a melody and of the colours of a standard.

Many of the great captains or great adventurers whose lives were written by Brantôme already knew all this. During their campaigns, they were followed by instrumentalists whose office was at the same time that of soldiers and that of servants. A little later, in the seventeenth century, when every one of fashion made it a point of honour to have among his people some "valets musicians," and when "précieux" and "précieuses" had only to call out "Hola! violins!" to have played for them a dance tune, many chiefs of the army contrived to procure the same entertainment to the ladies who sometimes used to make the

camps the objective point for a walk. And so, the presence of stringed instruments at the head quarters may be indicated without involving for them any of the warlike obligations which rested entirely on more robust and more sounding instruments, as drums, trumpets, fifes and oboes. We shall try to define in a few words the state and part of each one of these in the French army, at the moment when their use became the object of Louis XIV's solicitude.

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It is rather surprising to ascertain that three of the principal authors whom we may call upon to give evidence on the subject of the drum and of its military use in France, during the XVI and XVII centuries were churchmen: a canon from Langres, Jehan Tabourot, who published under an anagram of his name Thoinot Arbeau, in 1588, the precious treatise on "the honest exercise of dances" called *Orchésographie*; a canon from Rouen, preacher to the king, Etienne Binet, who wrote under the pen name of René François, and made room in his "Essay on the Marvels of Nature" for a chapter on war, with a paragraph on the French manner of beating the drum; and lastly, a religious, a Minim, the celebrated P. Mersenne, who took good heed not to forget military musical instruments in the series of treatises included in his *Harmonie Universelle*.

It is because the regularity of the step is at the base of all the art of movement, that Thoinot Arbeau studied it as a prelude to all kinds of dances. As, said he, when three people are walking together, they go along at their own fancy without taking any trouble to keep time in their step, so the soldiers would walk in a confused and disorderly way, were they not obliged, by the beating of a drum in time, to keep step in their squads: and it is in order to prevent uncertainty which would put them in danger of being defeated, that the French decided to lead the soldiers by the beating of a drum.

The instrument which was then in use, and which is described by the old author, was made of a hollow wood barrel about two feet and a half long and equally broad, covered at its two ends with two stretched parchment skins, fastened with hoops and braced by stretched cords. The drummer held it hanging nearly horizontally under his left arm with his elbow leaning on it. The measure he struck counted eight equal beats; each of the first four was marked by a stroke of one drumstick

only; the fifth, by a stroke of the two sticks together, and the three last were counted in silence:



At the sound of the first note, the soldier put down his left foot; at the sound of the fifth, his right foot. This double movement makes a *passée*, and, with 2,500 *passées* or repetitions of the 8 time measure, the soldier walks over the length of a league.

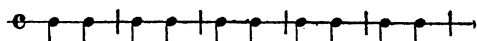
The sound of drums being, as says Thoinot Arbeau, more pleasant when varied, the players exercised their skill in breaking the monotony by combining the three sorts of values, which they intermingled according to their fancy on the first five beats, the three last being always invariably filled out with rests, whose position in the rhythmical scheme is peculiar, once for all, to the "French march."

The Swiss march, on the other hand, or, as it is called in the *Orchésographie*, "the Swiss drum," is distinguished by the introduction of a rest at the fourth beat:

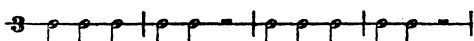


This particular rhythm was traditional with the Helvetian levies and it will be remembered that Clement Jannequin introduced it, with a descriptive intention, in his famous song of the Battle of Marignan (Melegnano), which commemorates the defeat of the Swiss (1515).

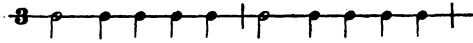
Thoinot Arbeau having in view only the music necessary to keep up marching and dancing, did not mention the military signals the drum can give. However, he alluded to them when he said that the sound of the instruments performs the office of telling the soldiers to "déloger" (to march), to go forward, to go backward, and to hurry the march on the quick two-part time called by the poets *pirrichie*, made up of equal strokes, hasty and harsh, giving a sound like the shots of an arquebuse:



Lastly, he foresaw the possibility of a march beaten in a three-part time, in which the five notes would be followed by a single rest, the soldier weighing upon his left foot with the first sound, and upon his right foot with the fourth:



This rhythmical division, which he declared to be "very nice," differs only by the position of the accent from that of the *basse danse*, as sounded by the drums of Provence, struck by one drumstick only:



The *tenor* and the *bassus* also mark the accent heavily in the *Volte du Tambour* included in the great instrumental collection of Praetorius, *Terpsichore Musarum*, printed in 1612:

A musical score for five voices: Cantus, Altus, Tenor, Quintus, and Bassus. The music is in a key of one sharp (F#) and 3/4 time. The Cantus part is on a treble clef staff, the Altus on a treble clef staff, the Tenor on a treble clef staff, the Quintus on a bass clef staff, and the Bassus on a bass clef staff. The music consists of a series of eighth notes, with the Tenor and Bassus parts having a strong accent on the first note of each measure.

Thirty years after Thoinot Arbeau, René François praised the excellence of the beat of the French drum, the best, said he, for sounding the march and for keeping the soldier in step. He went on to say that for the alarm the "drum-colonel" beat at first some hurried taps on the drum, and, in the case of a secret move, the skin was covered so as to muffle the sound.

Mersenne, in 1636, stated that the barrel of the drum was made sometimes of brass, sometimes of wood, usually oak. He did not mention any changes in its dimensions; but the iconographic documents of the same time show us that the old manner of holding the instrument under the arm had been given up, and that henceforward the nearly vertical position, by the left leg, made easier the management of the sticks by the two hands.

Therefore, the skill of the players improved, and the learned monk was amazed at seeing the drum beaten so quickly that the mind could neither number the multitude of the strokes, nor understand their strength and the resistance of the parchment. The roll had become an element of variety in the rhythmical design, and drummers were skilful in obtaining variations of intensity by beating the drum-head either on the middle or on the sides.

Three manners of attacking the sound were practised: the beating of the "round beat," in which the sticks give a stroke one after the other, and the beating of the "broken beat," in

which each stick strikes two strokes successively; lastly, the "mingled beat," consisting of two strokes by one hand for one by the other.

As to retreat, it is beaten with the two sticks together. Mersenne excused himself for not having room enough to give the notation of the beats of drum in use for "the simple and double entrance, the march, the double march, the assembly, the *ban*, the *diane*, the *chamade* and the alarm," and the suggestion he makes to his readers to go home and study there this notation offers now-a-days little consolation for a loss so much to be regretted.

The fife, often added to the drum, was, according to Mersenne, "the special instrument" of the Swiss, who introduced it in the various nations with which they enlisted. It was the primitive model of the transverse flute, called the Swiss flute in Germany and the German flute in France. As it was always used by itself, its habitual lack of accuracy of tone did not grate upon anyone's ear, and provided that the performer knew how to come in exactly upon the *passées*, the rhythm of which was sustained by the drum, nobody asked him the reason for the succession of notes he played just as he liked. Thoinot Arbeau has given a copious specimen of these strings of notes in which we would be puzzled to discover a real melodious purport, but in which exist already the forms which Louis XIV will sanction in his ordinances.



Neither the *Orchésographie* nor even Mersenne, in 1636, knew yet the military rôle of the oboe, but the laborious Minim willingly went into detail about the trumpet, which instrument, said he, is used in peace, as well as in war, in all sorts of rejoicings and public solemnities. His taste for scientific studies induced him to examine chiefly the structure of the instrument, but happily he showed himself less parsimonious as to notations, than in the chapter relating to the drum, and he gave the set of the eleven chief calls "which are in use in the militia." He even added to this set a specimen of flourish, a "song for trumpets"





are made clear, and at the same time the artistic importance of the whole work is revealed.

The task of Lully and of less eminent musicians, whose names are given with his in Philidor's in-folio, was not confined to the drawing up of simple rhythmic formulas. Each signal has a corresponding piece of music for two or four instrumental parts, based on the rhythm of the drum, and meant to be played together with or alternating with it. Although nowhere is found the indication of the instruments which are to perform the parts, the disposition of them is such as to allow the instruments to be recognized: this arrangement, as in the pieces in dance form, making up the repertory of the musicians of the *Ecurie*, is that of the familiar types for oboes, noted according to their sonorous compass, in clefs of G first line and C first and second line and seconded by the bassoon, which is noted in the F clef fourth line.

Therefore, the introduction of the oboe in the service of the armies, was an accomplished fact, and was not limited to substitution for the fife. Thanks to the various models of oboe, real little orchestras were made up, in perfect equilibrium and of a regular composition, the office of which, always closely united to the necessities of manœuvre, was not any longer confined to the summary interpretation of the code of signals.

Such a capital innovation must have taken place under the king's eyes, in the body of troops attached to his person. The foreign traveller in 1657 whose diary was published by Faugère, did not mention the oboe in his description of the royal train. "We went," said he, "to see the king, coming back from Vincennes (to Paris) with his new hundred and twenty musketeers who are also his guard. These are certainly well selected men, who are magnificently clad, for each of them wears a blue cloak adorned with large silver crosses and golden flames ending in fleurs de lys. Over the whole cloak is much silver lace. Nobody is admitted among them who is not a nobleman and brave to the utmost. . . . They have two drummers and one fifer. Each carries a musket and fastens the tinder of it to the head-stall of the bridle between the horse's ears." These were the grey musketeers, so called from the uniform color of their horses, and beside whom, later on, we find under a similar denomination, the black musketeers or the second company.

Serving, as did the dragons some years later, on foot or on horseback, they had, for the latter case, two trumpets, and this fact dispenses us from supposing, as certain authors have done, the very singular use of a riding drummer. It would be, according

to Kastner, in the year 1663, that the fife in the musketeers' corps was replaced by the oboe, and if the date remains indeed unsettled, it is certainly a fact, that these troops were in possession of this last instrument at the time of the taking of Douai from the Imperialists, in 1667. The account of this feat given by Pellisson imputes the honour of it to the assault by the musketeers, who "ascended the trench, drums beating, together with oboes."

The adoption of these instruments had not, as has been thought, as a consequence, the total and immediate relinquishment of the fife. On the contrary, the continuation of the use of this last instrument is inferred from the text of a royal ordinance dated the 18th of January, 1683, which prescribed keeping one fife only in each regiment, for the first company, and, from three references found in Philidor's manuscript: the words "tune for fifes or oboes" written at the head of the musical piece joined to the beating of the call for the "garde française;" the rank of "fifer of the musketeers' company," given to Des Roziers, an author of another piece in four-parts; and last, the piece in *solo*, called "the ordinance for the fife," which had taken the place of the French March, and in which three little melodic formulas spring straight from those played at the time of the *Orchésographie*:



As soon as the first military bands were organized, each of the corps belonging to the king's house was endowed not only with a particular march, but also with a whole set of drum-beats and instrumental pieces making up its own repertory. With the exception of the *Générale*, which was, by its destination, common to the whole infantry (except for the king's dragoons, who had the privilege of having their own "*Générale*" composed by Philidor the Younger), the beats and symphonies of the "call," of the "laying down arms" and of the "retreat," were different in the bands of the French Guards, the Musketeers, the Dragoons and the Swiss Guards. When the "king's regiment" was established, the French March was at first used in it, then that of the Musketeers, until Lully wrote a new march for it. Either to obey the king's orders, or at the colonels' request, Lully, and, following his example, the two brothers Philidor, the Elder and the Younger, Martin Hotteterre, Louis de Mollier, Lalande, wrote marches having four or two parts for oboe and bassoon,

with or without drums, for the French and Swiss guards, the Scotch dragoons, the Monterey's dragoons, the Fusileers, the Gunners, the Naval Guards, the regiment of Boulogne under the duke d'Aumont's command, etc. Soon after, requests arrived from foreign countries. Lully, as a reward for the composition of three drum-calls and five instrumental pieces, received from Victor-Amédée, duke of Savoy, the picture of H. H. "richly set with diamonds, worth a thousand crowns," which was delivered to him by H. H.'s ambassador. Later, the prince of Orange bespoke of him a march, while the march of the Royal Scotch regiment, serving in France, crossed the Channel to become in England the special march of the 1st Regiment of foot. Soon after the accession of Philippe d'Anjou to the throne of Spain, Matho, the two Philidors, and the oboist Desjardins wrote for the new King's musketeers, on Lully's models, three series of drum-beats and pieces of music.

Some of these pieces are provided with annotations, giving information about their dates and about the personal interference of Louis XIV in the circumstances of their composition. One of these pieces for the drum was written by Lully at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1670, on the order of the king, who wanted to change the march of the musketeers; another was composed by Philidor the Elder, "at the king's command," in 1674; another, an arrangement in trio for oboes on the tune of the *Folies d'Espagne* (one of the few pieces in this collection the purpose of which is not obviously military) has for heading "written in 1672 by Lully, Philidor the Elder having received the king's order at St. Germain-en-Laye for M. de Lully." The date 1692 is to be found on a Grenadiers march, from the same Philidor, composed during the siege of Namur, and the date 1694, on the pieces of music written by the same author for the regiment of Boulogne.

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Kastner published in the appendix of his *Manuel de Musique Militaire*, in 1848, a generous selection of pieces extracted from the manuscript of Versailles. It is from this edition that M. Kappey in England has reproduced one and M. Parès in France, two of the marching airs by Lully. By writing under the score of each piece in this collection the notation of the beat to which it belongs, one sees how close is the subordination of the musical texture to the rhythm of the drum, and, in a word, how far "the air of the oboes" is really sprung from the drum-beat. We

show this combination in the following examples, where also we believe we have made the reading easier by substituting modern clefs for the ancient ones of the original by translating into little notes the mordents which are expressed in the manuscript by crosses. Whatever the key of the piece may be, the rhythm of the drum will be conventionally figured on the note C.

We reproduce first the whole of the first and most interesting of the five versions of the "Musketeers march" which Lully composed:

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Hautbois, Basson, and Tambour. The second system includes staves for Tambour I and Tambour II. The notation uses modern clefs and includes rhythmic markings for the drums.

A comparison of Lully's "first tune of the French march" with the third, of which the author is Louis de Mollier, will show how the same rhythmical design was faithfully adopted by the various composers, who had to set to music a drum-call. The

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one which we are now speaking of is still identical with the formula used at the time of Thoinot Arbeau (see example 1):

Lully

Hautbois

Basson

Tambour

This musical score is for a march by Jean-Baptiste Lully. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Hautbois (oboe), Basson (bassoon), and Tambour (drum). The second system continues the music for these instruments. The third system also continues the music. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written in a style characteristic of the 17th-century French military band.

Mollier

Hautbois

Tambour

This musical score is for a march by Jean-Baptiste Mollier. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Hautbois (oboe) and Tambour (drum). The second system continues the music for these instruments. The third system also continues the music. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The music is written in a style characteristic of the 17th-century French military band.



Who would here not give the preference to Lully's version? A master's hand is felt in the least details, and one is not surprised to see, scattered among these small pieces of military music, many motives of clear outline and of well marked rhythm which Lully surrounds with light counterpoint, without pedantry or excess. Soon after, he will transport to the stage the form, which he has just created, and he will introduce into the warlike opera of *Thésée*, in 1675, a march planned in imitation of those given to the troops of the king of France, but more brilliantly coloured with the splendor of the trumpets and of the kettle-drums.

A musical score for four staves, labeled "Trompettes", "Violons", and "Timbales". The music is in 3-2 time. The "Trompettes" staff has a melodic line with a repeat sign and the word "etc." at the end. The "Violons" staff provides a harmonic accompaniment. The "Timbales" staff has a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The music is written in a style characteristic of 17th-century French military music.

The *duple* time is not exclusively used in the military repertory made up by Lully and by the musicians who, in this matter, may be looked upon as his fellow-authors. When Lully set to music his "March of the king's regiment," he wrote it in 3-2 time, but, in reality, this measure was divided into two ternary groups, as are the 6-8 of the modern double quick time. In this march, as the *Orchésographie* had already pointed out the possibility, the pressure of the first foot is made on the first beat, and

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of the second foot on the fourth; the simple notation of the piece shows this, ending by two dotted minims in each bar, and the formula of the bass strengthens it under the more embroidered designs of the upper parts:



The Swiss March was written in simple triple time. It was established on a beat unlike the one peculiar to the Swiss levies

The musical score for the Swiss March is presented in three systems. Each system contains three staves: Hautbois (treble clef), Basson (bass clef), and Tambour (bass clef). The time signature is 3/8. The music is written in a simple, rhythmic style, with the Hautbois part often featuring more melodic lines and the Basson and Tambour parts providing a steady, rhythmic foundation. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.





So, the oboes, replacing the fife almost completely and definitively, filled under Louis XIV the very part the clarion has filled since 1825 in the French infantry, and Lully's small military orchestra corresponds to what to-day our soldiers call the *clique*—the groupe of drums and clarions for transmitting the signals and for regulating the step during marching. But this orchestra, including the four types of a complete instrumental family, and the pieces forming its repertory being written in real four-part counterpoint, it becomes at the same time the artistic attire of a body of troops, and it adorns the accomplishment of military duties by the virile beauty of its martial accents.

Lully and his contemporaries (Louis XIV, without doubt, being the first) had about this kind of music a wholly objective idea. To their minds each piece and each execution must answer an exigency of the service: a marching tune is only to be sounded at the head of a marching troop. The music is an auxiliary language for the command. Then nobody foresaw the concerts that later on were to be given by performers in uniform, drawn up in a ring, in the centre of a public walk, playing for the amusement of loungers "pots-pourris" succeeding "valse lentes" and fantasies on fashionable subjects succeeding transcriptions of symphonies and of whole acts of operas.

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Nothing indicates how many musicians were included in an infantry band in the armies of Louis XIV. But, if we do not forget that a century later, at the eve of the Revolution, the regular number was eight, we may suppose very likely that such was the effective force put at Lully's disposition, and that each of the four harmonic parts added to the drum beat was divided in two.

One is, at first sight, a little disconcerted at reading the royal ordinances dated the 10th of March, 1672, and the 18th of January, 1683, which seem to be contradictory to all the measures taken exactly at the same time, and to pronounce simultaneously the suppression of the oboes, at the very time when the king's favourite musicians were striving hard to create for these instruments a military repertory. But in studying these texts more closely, we understand that they are evidently written only with an intent to hold in check the excess of an emulation which had spread to the captains of companies, and which led to the multiplication of many rival groups of instruments in a

regiment, in a manner as useless for the service as it was burdensome for the captains. For, in fact, the public treasury took upon itself the expenses of one drum only in each company of foot, or of one trumpet in each company of cavalry, and the other performers were to be hired and paid at the colonels' and officers' cost. We will not linger to observe that this system of recruiting and of maintaining military orchestras was practised during this and the following centuries in all the armies of Europe. But we must conclude by casting a glance on the state of music in the mounted troops, which we have till now left out of our statement.

The trumpet remained rightly the special instrument of the cavalry. The comparison of the signals set to music by Mersenne, with those contained in Philidor's manuscript, shows that the skill of the performers had improved in lightness and swiftness of the "coup de langue." Five couplets were sometimes written for the flourish of the march, and more for the trumpet's "sound to boot and saddle."

All was played in unison, and it has not come to our knowledge that the flourish having two or three trumpet parts had been heard anywhere else but in the tilting-matches, where they were performed by the musicians of the "Grande Ecurie." The collection of in-folio engraved plates, thanks to which the memory of the ring-tiltings in 1662 has been kept, does not fail to picture with great details the groups of trumpets and kettle-drums accompanying each quadrille. Louis XIV, wearing a magnificent dress, was caracoling among the Roman party, who were adorned with no fewer feathers than the parties of the Turks and of the "Ameriquains." When the tilts began, the musicians drew up in a line in the tilt-yard and, undoubtedly, made the greatest noise they could. For the tilting-match of 1686, tunes in two or three parts for trumpets, prelude, gavotte, minuet and jig were composed by Lully. Admitted by Philidor in his manuscript, they were added by M. Rhodes to his printed essay on the king's trumpets.

One of the beats for kettle-drums likewise contained in the manuscript of Versailles, is a march written for the King's Guard, of which the author was Claude Babelon, the holder of the position of "kettle-drummer for diversions." The form of this piece, as of the others, was inspired by the service of the prince. The decorative effect of the kettle-drums, as much as their martial sound, caused their introduction in corps vying with each other in luxury as well as in valour. It is said that for a long time the favour of having a pair of kettle-drums preceding the trumpets

was granted only to the regiments who had won it in fighting against the enemy. Thus, being trophies of war, the kettle-drums could be given but to "gallant-minded men" who would prefer "to perish in the fight, rather than to surrender their instruments." But, at the same time, the kettle-drummer ought to have "a fine motion of the arms, a good ear" and to know how to please his chiefs by playing pleasant tunes during times of rejoicing.

Mallet, who thus described in 1691, in *Les Travaux de Mars*, the accomplishments of a good kettle-drummer, was portraying, in a few words and unwittingly, the very spirit of military music, in which must be found, in equal shares, heroism and beauty.

(Translated by Mariola Chardon.)